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The central question in this study was: can staff members responsible for administering ESEA Title III (Projects to Advance Creativity in Education, PACE) in five states comprehend PACE intents in a manner comparable to that of the United States Office of Education (USOE) staff responsible for the national administration of the act? It was hypothesized that there would be greater conformity to USOE jury-judged PACE intents, with the higher one proceeding up the PACE responsibility ladder from state-regional PACE implementors to USOE PACE administrators. Computer programs for analysis of data are reported in detail, and the results are generally the reverse of those hypothesized. Possible explanations were seen in (1) out-group motivational set for acceptance, (2) power-periphery search for increased power through conformity, and (3) the use of maximum discretionary authority in higher education. (BP)

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# A COMPARISON OF ESEA TITLE III PERCEPTIONS AND PREFERENCES BETWEEN SELECTED STATES' AND USOE ESEA TITLE III STAFF MEMBERS

by

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Posed in the completed study was this central question:

Can staff members responsible for administering ESEA Title III (Projects to Advance Creativity in Education) in five participating states comprehend PACE intents in a manner comparable to that of United States Office of Education staff members responsible for the national administration of the title?

This question had become a critical issue during 1967 in national debate on Congressional deliberations over amendments to the Elementary-Secondary Education Act of 1965. Nationally reputable, informed and articulate opinion argued for and against one amendment authorizing the transfer of PACE administrative authority to the states commencing July 1, 1968. This debate culminated in the passage of the amendments, including a two-year phased transfer of ESEA Title III to the states, on January 2, 1968 (P.L. 90-247).

In an attempt to answer the question, an array of eight PACE abstracts was used representing diversity of project activity ranging over fine arts, the sciences, teacher in-service, early-childhood education, cooperative-resource projects, special education, etc. The abstracts had been developed from more than 200 funded PACE projects from which all identification was removed in four of the five participating states. During July and August, 1968, 47 USOE and state staff members provided pre-data (idiosyncratic responses); during October and November, 1968, 36 USOE and state staff members --- 28 of whom were pre-test subjects --- provided post-data (institutional-goal responses).

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Used also was a multidimensional, nonmetric scaling technique called MAPP (Mathematical Analysis of Perception and Preference) designed for and used experimentally in market research. MAPP, an acronym for 50-plus analytic subroutines, relies heavily on high-power computers, requires little or no verbal interplay between tester and respondent and no respondent introspection or explanation of perceptual (as many as there are stimuli) or preferential (one) sorts. MAPP, using response redundancy (168 circular similarity triads for the eight stimuli used in this study, 28 scaled-distance perceptual pairs in a chain-order matrix, a universe of $3.04888 \times 10^{29}$ possible perceptual configurations), provides both statistical and simple-space plot outputs.

One of MAPP's preprocessing subroutines, TRICON --- triangularization of conjoint data, also provides an intransitivity count, i.e., the number of the respondent's perceptual inconsistencies in a square precedence matrix. Another subroutine, TORSCA --- a multiple dimension scaling technique and simple-space analysis, provides an index of stress as the stimuli (N) are first mathematically fitted to an N-1 dimension (zero stress) and successively through all other dimensions down to one. Taken together, TRICON intransitivities and TORSCA stress levels were used as indicators of post-testing cognitive-dissonance reduction in the study.

Another MAPP subroutine, Carroll-Chang, is a generalization of the Coombsian Unfolding Model. With it the single-sort preferential vector is fitted to TORSCA's simple-space solution of the multiple-sort perceptual configuration. The "goodness-of-fit" index, a Pearson product-moment correlation, illustrates perceptual-preferential fit while suggesting how much the former determines the latter.

Hypothesized was participating states' ability to comprehend (to discriminate and to differentiate among) PACE intents using as "benchmarks" USOE participant responses and USOE jury-judging. A multiple (five) hypotheses approach revolving around more or less comprehension dependent upon PACE hierarchical responsibility was used. A sixth hypothesis concerning communication across the USOE-state education departments-field implementors continuum in the study design was also tested.

Generally expected was greater conformity to USOE jury-judged PACE intents (institutional-goal behaviors) the higher one proceeded up the PACE-responsibility ladder --- from state-regional PACE implementors (rung 1) to state department newer staff (2), state department more experienced staff (3), state PACE coordinators --- the states' most experienced staff (4), USOE area-desk PACE staff (5), and USOE PACE administrators (rung 6).

Generally found was the opposite. Both USOE subgroups responded idiosyncratically in relation to the jury-judged "ideal" --- law, regulation and guideline-determined "institutional-goal" behavior. Both USOE subgroups regressed from pre-test positions during post-testing. State-regional PACE directors, the field implementors, exhibited the greatest movement (58 per cent) toward the perceptual "ideal" during post-testing followed by the state education departments' more-experienced staff (28 per cent) and the less-experienced newer staff (10 per cent). The most-experienced state staff, the PACE coordinators, recorded zero movement toward the perceptual "ideal," pre to post. State coordinators' zero movement, like USOE regressive movement, was interpreted as purposeful rather than uninformed.

Although intent-congruence hypotheses according to hierarchical positioning were rejected, state department managing and state-regional implementor staff responses indicated intent-comprehension ability. USOE ability, previously assumed, was substantiated in USOE jury-development of the "ideal benchmarks." State coordinators' ability was inferred since they were largely responsible for the training of the other two state education department subgroups which responded positively to institutional-goal treatment and PACE-intent discrimination and differentiation testing --- a response that had been hypothesized and was expected.

Found also was acceptable sensitivity to the PACE intents' semantic context across federal, state and state-regional participant levels. This finding reinforced that of an earlier study which was more concerned with the communication process, per se --- Michael H. Halbert, Corinne Silverman, Patrick F. Toole, Perceptual Style and Administrative Structure (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Inquiring Systems, Inc., September, 1968).

A third finding was cognitive-dissonance reduction during post-testing, interpreted to be the result of post-test use of a ready-made construct (institutional-goal oriented) in stimuli sorting. A fourth finding, cutting across all levels in pre-testing, found primarily in higher USOE levels during post-testing, was evident bias against legislatively mandated categorical aid in what otherwise is a broad-program title (categorical innovation and exemplarity excepted).

Suggested for the hypothesized institutional-goal-conformity reversal were the following possible explanations:

1. In-group vs. out-group concepts in small-group theory wherein the in-groups need conform less, the out-groups need conform

more to be accepted.

2. Power (or resource) allocation concepts in social and political science theory wherein peripheral power groups will conform more in order to increase their share of available power; power-center groups, unless threatened with loss of power --- a threat obviously not implicit in this study, do not have this reason to conform.

3. Discretionary-authority concepts in administrative theory, wherein the higher the level of responsibility (occupationally and/or professionally) the greater the amount of discretionary authority and the concomitant flexibility to bend institutional norms.

Although the three explanations considered are not mutually exclusive, this investigator's bias (and PACE experience) inclines him toward the last explanation.

Recommended was a refinement of the study-used stimuli to overcome a program-flow limitation. Also recommended was replication, a further-refined study, in other states to overcome another limitation --- that of non-generalizability. Further recommended was additional computer analysis of the available study data for higher-order constructs or processes and for cognitive "mapping," particularly in relation to the cognitive-construct attributes used by USOE staff members during post-testing which are evidently more complex than the institutional-goal construct suggested during treatment and which centers on legislated or stated national priorities. In this study, analysis of the preferential data focused almost completely on subject responses per se. Perceptual analysis, using correlative methods, slightly touched response patterns. Not used in this study were MAPP discriminant analysis techniques such as the Howard-Harris Program, a clustering routine using Euclidean distance measures as proximity measures. Finally recommended was a review of categorical mandates and concomitant restrictions, program and administrative, in the context of participant bias against such restrictions and evident across all participant levels.

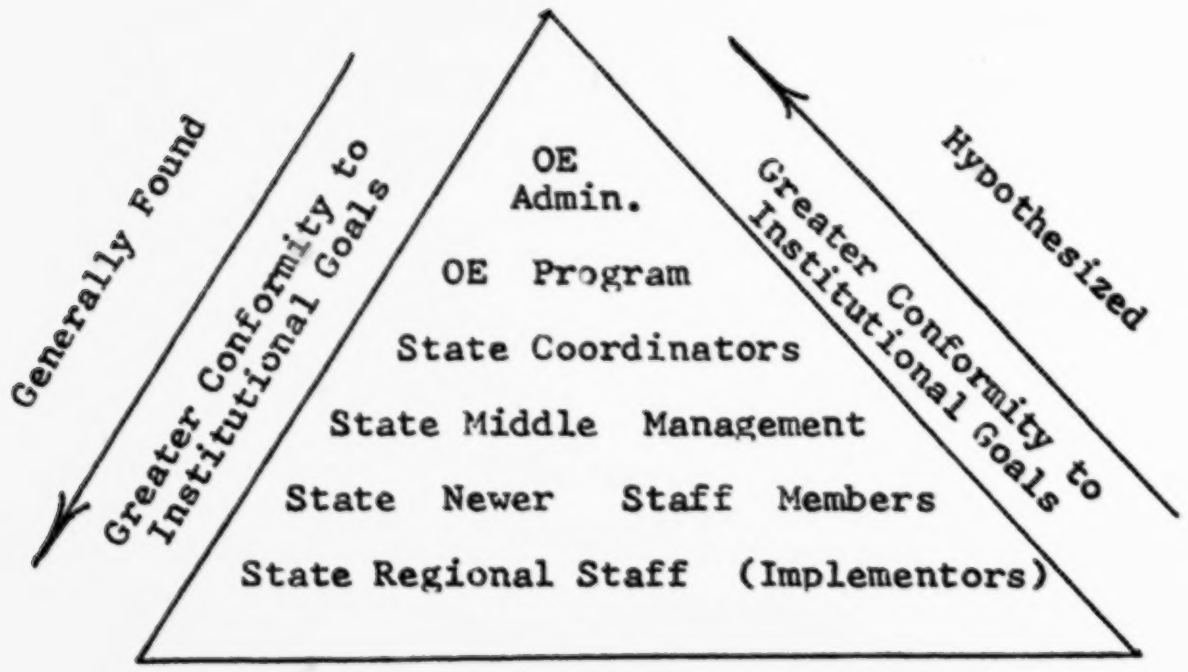


Figure 1: FEDERAL-STATE ESEA TITLE III HIERARCHY

Possible explanations:

1. In-group, out-group behavior with the latter having a motivational set for acceptance.

2. Power-center, power-periphery with the latter seeking to increase its share of available power through institutional-norm conformity.

3. Use of maximum discretionary authority in higher echelons, constrained discretion in lower echelons.